DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 034 CE 004 792

AUTHOR Kingsley, Ronald F.; Kokaska, Charles
TITLE Economic Competency: Implications for Programs for the Educable Mentally Retarded.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 9p.
JOURNAL CIT Middle School Journal; v6 n1 p17-20 Spring 1975

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Budgeting; *Consumer Education; Curriculum Design; *Educable Mentally Handicapped; *Educational Programs; *Money Management; Program Content; *Work Study Programs

ABSTRACT

One of the major objectives of programing for the educable mentally retarded is the development of the individual's economic competency or efficiency. In order to reinforce this objective it is necessary that classroom activities employ real money and that some type of work experience be provided so that students learn to manage a given amount of economic resources within the community marketplace. With most jobs open to the retarded being low-paying service occupations, it is paramount that educational programs provide the best possible training and the survival skills necessary to make every dollar stretch as far as possible. The educational program conceptualized to meet this need contains two interacting phases: classroom instruction which focuses on problem solving, and work-study which provides economic rewards for completing specific repetitive duties characterized as work tasks. Once work-study programs are operational, it is possible to introduce into the curriculum the concepts of consumer education, suggested topics for which are: banking and savings, bills, borrowing money, budgeting, buying on credit, home ownership, insurance, medical-dental, renting, shopping techniques, taxes, and transportation. Thus students' experience of earning a salary is complemented with that of their own planned utilization of financial resources within the community marketplace. (Author/JR)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED112034

ECONOMIC COMPETENCY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS FOR THE EDUCABLE MENTALLY RETARDED

by

Ronald F. Kingsley (Kent State University)

and

Charles Kokaska (Calif. State Univ., Long Beach)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

One of the major objectives of programming for the educable mentally retarded is the development of the individual's economic competency or efficiency. This objective frequently appears in curriculum guides and is listed as one of the major purposes of education, along with the development of self-realization, civic responsibility, and human relationship (Educational Policies Commission, 1938). Good (1959) defined economic competency as:

> "The ability of the individual to perform effectively the business aspects of everyday living, for example, using credit wisely, using the services of a bank, investing money, buying insurance, and other similar activities...." (p. 115)

If one were to re-read the above definition and let his mind wander over the educational activities which are listed in curriculum guides, it is somewhat difficult to imagine the actual implementation of this objective without the utilization of authentic currency. Students can use "play" money and imitate the procedures of opening and closing a bank account, purchasing the weekly groceries, or applying for credit. However, there is quite a difference between the theoretical and the actual budgeting and utilization of one's wages.

Classroom activities and lessons with authentic currency reinforce the main objective of instruction, i.e. to present meaningful and relevant experiences which are related to the over-all intent of the work-study program. The extended importance of meaningful classroom activities as related to adult experience is emphasized by Schwarz (1968):

> "The success of the educational process can only be measured by the degree to which a student is prepared to cope with the contingencies that will face him as an adult." (p. 35)

Indeed, several curriculum directors have reported to these writers that one of the most recurring problems with their graduates concerns the budgeting of finances. Essentially the graduates are failing at a management problem as they attempt to schedule several independent demands upon one source--the paycheck. The problem is intensified if they have had minimum practice in assessing their own needs, resources, and particularly, their spending behaviors.

Middle School Journal, 6, 1, Spring 1975, 17-20.

CE 004 792

JUL 25 1975

The Theoretical and the Actual

The problem of the transfer of training from the theoretical classroom setting to the reality of later adult experience is not new to educational personnel. The writers recall the results of one follow-up study (Kokaska, 1966) in which a secondary school system attempted to obtain information relative to post-school adjustment. One of the items in the questionnaire was related to the graduates' participation in community elections and government through the simple act of voting. Participation in community elections was visualized as an important ingredient of adult and civic responsibility, and another means through which the retarded would be integrated into the community.

The researchers discovered that all eligible individuals had not only failed to vote in the most recent election, but weren't even registered. The disclosure created a certain amount of disappointment for the classroom teachers due to the fact that this element of adult life was continually emphasized throughout the students' educational program. The survey findings should not have embarrassed educators if they realized that at that time as many as three years would have to elapse before students were allowed to implement their classroom lessons.

Generalizing from the above example, one may state that no matter how intensive may be the classroom experience with the concept of economic competency, it is still not adequate without the students' management of a given amount of economic resources within the community market place. In his "Fundamental Principles of Instruction" Smith (1968) emphasized that the special student should engage in active participation in order to facilitate meaningful learning. If special educators are to actualize the objective of economic competency of efficiency, they must also provide for economic participation. Indeed, the writers contend that economic competency as a viable objective in school programming presupposes economic participation.

Relationship to Work-Study

It should be obvious that when special educators begin to discuss the subject of economic participation for the mentally retarded, they essentially are referring to programs which include a form of work experience. There is no need to pursue the work experience or work-study aspect of the curriculum as it has been extensively reviewed elsewhere (Cegelka, 1970; Kokaska, 1968).

Work-study and its main feature of part-time to full-time employment is pivotal to economic participation as it provides the student with financial rewards. For the benefit of this discussion, we assume that such rewards, whatever their source and amount, are available to the student. Considering current trends in education, one could seriously question whether programs for the retarded are relevant to their objectives without some form of work-study and, continuing further, whether the work experience phase of the program can fulfill its goals without financial remuneration.

Our essential emphasis is that these rewards become the basic ingredient of classroom activities which attempt to educate the student as to the most effective utilization of his financial resources. Our intent is to de-emphasize the abstract activities that can dominate particular areas of instruction between two major modes of the program--classroom instruction and work-study experience.

There is another serious implication related to the rewards gained from work-study as well as post-school vocational placement. There is a current thrust within the education and habilitation of the retarded toward placing students within service industries since the Department of Labor (1962) has projected these occupations to expand in the coming years. It should be noted that service occupations furnish economic returns which can range near a subsistence level. For example, eating and drinking places constitute one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the United States, and employed more than two million people in 1968. The various occupations of kitchen helper, waiter, cook and counterman, which are continually in demand within the industry, have received increased emphasis within work-study programs as likely job placements for the retarded. A study conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that the average hourly wage for non-tipped employees "was only $1.51 in April, 1967. Average straight-time wage rates for the industry's 143,000 dishwashers was only $1.23." (Department of Labor, 1969, p 9)

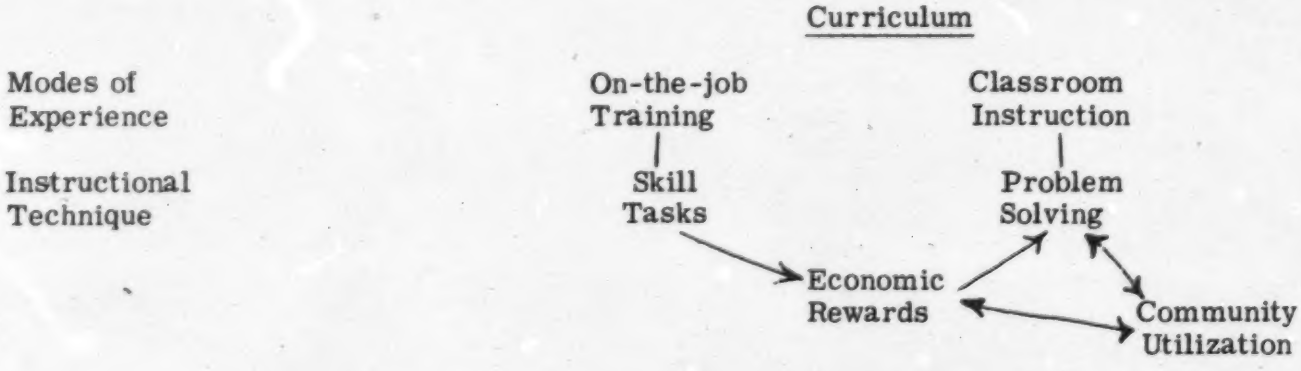
The above data are a few years "old" and certainly does not reflect the average wage rate of all graduates from work-study programs. However, jobs in service areas generally command wage rates which are listed at the lower end of the continuum of occupations. Given this precarious balance between the economic rewards of a particular occupation and the amount of subsistence required by the individual and his family, it is paramount that educational programs provide the best possible vocational training and the survival skills to literally make every dollar stretch as far as possible.

Development of Economic Competency

Figure 1 presents a design for the development of economic competency.

FIGURE 1

Design for the Development
of Economic Competency in the Curriculum



The educational program is conceptualized as containing two primary modes of experience, i.e. classroom instruction and on-the-job training. The major means of differentiating these two areas of experience is through an examination of the instructional techniques which are emphasized at each location. As presented in the design, on-the-job training requires the student to complete specific repetitive duties characterized as work tasks; for example: cleaning, counting, grinding, lifting, polishing, recording. These tasks may draw upon fundamental academic skills which have been reinforced in the classroom.

The instructional approach in the classroom is focused upon problem solving. This requires various mastery levels of the academic skills (reading, writing and arithmetic) but applies them in seeking and utilizing appropriate sources of information to gain solutions to problems of survival, i.e., finding a job, filing an income tax return, and choosing appropriate insurance plans.

The design includes a scheme in which the goal of economic competency is achieved through the interaction of the work-study phase (which provides the student with economic rewards) and the instructional phase (which utilizes the rewards in problem solving). This interaction is aided further through the feedback of information relative to student utilization of wages as a resource in the community. Unlike the example of one school system being forced to wait until the student's participation in the voting process in order to determine the effectiveness of their instruction, special class teachers can begin to assess student attitudes and practices in economic matters with receipt of the first paycheck from the work-study placement.

Economic Competency-Consumer Education

Once work-study programs are operational in the sense that their participants obtain financial remuneration and teachers begin to use these rewards as a vehicle for classroom instruction, the curriculum can be further refined to accentuate the quality of economic participation. It is at this juncture that the whole area of the curriculum known as "consumer education" receives new emphasis.

The teacher's major concern at this point should be with whether students consider alternatives in spending, saving, or investing. This quest for alternatives during the problem solving classroom activities necessitates that students familiarize themselves with those major agents in the community's economic activities which influence the number and range of individual consumer decisions.

The following are areas of consumer education which can be incorporated within the elementary curriculum. (We are indebted to Alfred Schmidt, Associate Professor, California State University, Long Beach, for compiling these suggestions.) The list is by no means exhaustive. Teachers can expend additional effort in the area of shopping techniques by concentrating on such sub-topics as "shopping tips and techniques with foods," or furniture, cars and apartments. Secondly, a separate area could be added related to the advertising techniques that students may encounter on the radio, television, or in the printed media.

Suggested Consumer Education Topics

Banking and Savings

Opening a checking account.
Writing a check.
Filling out deposit and withdrawal slips.
Paying bills by personal check or money order.
Stopping payment on a check.
Checking a bank statement.
Service charges on checking accounts.
Opening a savings account.
Interest rates on savings accounts.
Additional services provided by bank: traveler's checks, money orders, loans, deposit box.

Bills

Type of bills.
Reading, checking and paying a bill.
Whom to contact in case of errors in billing.
Obtaining an extension on payment of a bill.
Decreasing the amounts on the bills.

Borrowing Money

Types of loans.
Where to obtain a loan.
Shopping for lower interest rates on loans.
Applying for a loan.
Consolidating bills into one loan.
Reading a loan contract.
Procedures to follow in case of inability to meet loan payments.

Budgeting

Managing money for:

a. rent or mortgage payments
b. clothing bills
c. food bills
d. entertainment or leisure cost
e. car payments or transportation
f. appliance payments
g. furniture payments
h. taxes
i. medical and dental payments
j. savings
k. miscellaneous; contributions, education, dues, gifts.

Buying on Credit

Types of charge/credit accounts.
Opening an account.
Completing an account application form.
Reading charge/credit statements.
Using a credit card.
What to do if a credit card is lost.

Home Ownership

Buying a house.
What is escrow?
Costs in buying a house.
Placing a downpayment on a house.
Cost of maintaining a house.
Cost of additions to the house.
Selling a house.
Utilizing a real estate office.

Insurance

Types of insurance.
Insurance required by law.
Cost of insurance.
Choosing an insurance policy and agent.
Completing an insurance form.
Paying a premium.
Receiving an insurance dividend.

Medical-Dental

Location and services of public medical facilities.
Costs of medical and dental care.
Obtaining Medicare.
Obtaining services on credit.
Where to go in case of emergency.
Applying for medical assistance in case of destitution.

Renting

Searching for an apartment or house.
Reading a lease.
Rental requirements designated by the owner.
Legal rights in case of discrimination.
Applying for public housing.

Shopping Techniques

Completing a shopping list.
Reading advertisements in the newspapers.
Reading a catalog.
Reading the classified section of a telephone directory.
Reading packaging, grading, labeling and price tags.
Utilizing discount and seconds sales.
Utilizing installment buying and payments.

Taxes

Types of taxes.
When to pay Federal and state income tax.
Completing income tax forms.
Purchasing assistance to complete income tax forms.

Transportation

Purchasing a new vehicle.
Purchasing a used vehicle.
Shopping for lower rates to finance a vehicle.
Completing an auto contract form.
Obtaining necessary insurance.
What to do in case of accidents.
Additional areas: ballon payments, discounts, auto blue book, costs of repair, add-on charges.

Summary

The previous suggestions relative to consumer education are intended to remind those of us who work with the EMR students that earning a salary is only the first step in the work-study program. If we are to achieve the goal of economic competency, then we must provide experiences under supervision with the rewards from the vocational assignment. One goal is to equip students with the ability to develop their own planned utilization of financial resources within the community marketplace.

References

Cegelka, W. J. "A Review of the Development of Work-Study Programs for the Mentally Retarded." Training School Bulletin, 67, 1970, 87-118.

Educational Policies Commission. The Purpose of Education in American Democracy. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association, 1938.

Good, C. V. (ed.) Dictionary of Education, Second Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1959, 115.

Kokaska, C. J. "The Mentally Retarded and the Ballot Box." Digest of the Mentally Retarded, 3, 1966-67, 124-125 & 132.

Kokaska, C. J. The Vocational Preparation of the Educable Mentally Retarded. Ypsilanti, Mich.: Eastern Michigan University Printing, 1968.

Schwarz, R. H. "Toward a Meaningful Education for the Retarded Adolescent." Mental Retardation, 6, 1968, 34-35.

Smith, R. H. Clinical Teaching: Methods of Instruction for the Retarded. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968, 58.

United States, Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Projections to the Year 1976 and 2000: Economic Growth, Population, Labor Force and Leisure, and Transportation. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1962.

United States, Department of Labor, Manpower Administration. Eating and Drinking Places Industry, Industry Manpower Survey No. 115. Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1969.